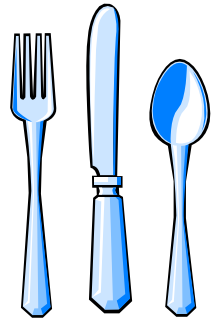


## Caregiving Tips for Making Mealtimes Easier and More Enjoyable

- Make nutritious finger foods and nutrient-rich homemade shakes or shake products (unless the person is lactose intolerant) available throughout the day.
- Offer appealing foods that have familiar flavors, varied textures, and different colors, and give the person opportunities to make choices.
- If the person is on a reduced-sodium or sugar-restricted diet because of hypertension, diabetes, or another medical condition, keep foods with high salt or sugar content out of reach or in a locked cabinet.
- Help the person drink plenty of fluids throughout the day—dehydration can lead to problems such as increased constipation, confusion, and dizziness.
- Use adaptive eating tools as needed. Talk with an occupational therapist about which tools might be helpful, as well as other strategies to make eating and mealtime routines more successful.
- View mealtimes as opportunities for social interaction and success for yourself and the person with dementia. A warm and happy tone of voice can set the mood.
- Try to make mealtimes calm, comfortable, and reassuring. Be patient, avoid rushing through meals, and give the person enough time to finish the meal.
- Be sensitive to possible frustration, confusion, and anxiety during mealtimes and look for ways to reduce these feelings.
- Maintain familiar routines and rituals, but be flexible and adapt to the person's changing needs.



## Caregiving Tips for Making Mealtimes Easier and More Enjoyable (continued)

- Minimize distractions during mealtimes. For example, turn off the television or radio, and eliminate unneeded items from the table.
- In the earlier stages of dementia, be aware of the possibility of overeating. If this occurs, provide a balanced diet, limit snacks, and offer engaging activities as alternatives to eating.
- Identify and work to resolve issues such as depression, forgetting to wear glasses or hearing aids, wearing poorly fitting dentures, and use of appetite-suppressing medications, which may impair the person's ability or desire to eat.
- Maintain routine dental checkups and daily oral health care.
- Be alert to and address potential safety issues, such as the person forgetting to turn off the stove after cooking and the increased risk of choking because of chewing and swallowing problems that may arise as the disease progresses.
- **And finally: Remember to take care of yourself** to reduce the stress of caring for others. Whenever you have questions or worries, get help from your health care provider, friends, and family.



Adapted from Encouraging Eating: Advice for at-home Dementia Caregivers.

**Source URL:** <http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/features/encouraging-eating-advice-home-dementia-caregivers>